



Critic of Reno Air Race safety sues over ban

September 6, 2012

A longtime critic of safety procedures at Reno's National Championship Air Races is suing organizers to try to strike down their ban on his access to the competition where 11 people were killed in a crash near the grandstand a year ago.

Mark Daniels said in a civil complaint filed in U.S District Court in Reno he has a First Amendment right to attend the 49th annual races Sept. 12-16.

The 56-year-old former Army helicopter mechanic and air traffic controller is one of the few people to speak out publicly in opposition to continuing the full slate of the races this year.

Air Races CEO Mike Houghton says Daniels' ban from the grounds is based on past threats and arrests for trespassing and has nothing to do with his criticism.

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Air Races make emotional return next week with tribute ceremonies

September 7, 2012

Next week, the TravelNevada.com Reno National Championship Air Races will return to northern Nevada for the 49th annual event. Beginning Wednesday, Sept. 12, planes will once again return to the Sierra skies in a world-class, weeklong event featuring six classes of aircraft in a head-to-head competition culminating in a race for the coveted Breitling Unlimited Championship trophy.

The event will feature one of the world's most advanced military aircraft — the F-22 Raptor — as well as emotional tribute ceremonies to remember and celebrate the lives of those lost as well as those impacted by the tragedy of last September. The races kick off Wednesday, Sept. 12 through Sunday, Sept. 16.

“The last year has been a true test to our organization, our fans, both the northern Nevada and

aviation communities and those who were directly impacted by the tragedy of last year,” said Mike Houghton, president and CEO of the Reno Air Racing Association. “We have worked hard to bring this historic event back to Reno and we look forward to remembering and celebrating as we, once again, gather for an aviation event unlike any other.”

This year’s event will commence with an emotional opening ceremony featuring a special and poignant tribute to courage, aviation and the memory and celebration of the lives lost last September. Special guests Mayor Bob Cashell of Reno and Mayor Geno Martini of Sparks will join president and CEO of the Reno Air Racing Association, Mike Houghton, in a special recognition of first responders, victims and fans.

“We are grateful for the tremendous leadership from our state and community leaders, local businesses and our sponsors for remaining by our side through a difficult time but we will truly never forget the incredible display of courage that was shown in a moment of tragedy last year by the first responders, victims and fans,” said Houghton. “This year’s event will pay tribute to everyone who was impacted or who provided support during this trying time and we have a very special and exciting week planned to properly remember and celebrate these heroes and the spirit of aviation.”

As part of its return, the TravelNevada.com National Championship Air Races welcome back the F-22 Raptor. Crowds will be in awe as they watch the elite Lockheed Martin aircraft roar through the skies in Reno. Originally conceived in the early 1980s, this unique aircraft was built for and put into use by the United States Air Force in 2005 and, today, exists as the most powerful and deadly airborne weapon in the world. The pilots of these remarkable aircraft are known for their incredible precision and stunning maneuvers including the power loop, split and tail slide. This remarkable demonstration team performs high speed maneuvers and tight turns, demonstrating extraordinary speed and agility.

Further, the event will feature some of the top civilian air show performers and additional military demonstration teams. The F/A-18E Super Hornet will perform a demonstration and legacy flight Friday, Sept. 14 through Sunday, Sept. 16 and the Patriot Jet Team will return to the Reno Air Races beginning Thursday, Sept. 13. Kent Pietsch, Clay Lacy and Jim Pietz will also perform their incredible aerobatic acts throughout the week.

The 49th annual TravelNevada.com National Championship Air Races take place Wednesday, Sept. 12 through Sunday, Sept. 16. For more information on this year’s event or to purchase tickets, visit www.airrace.org or call 775.972.6663. To plan your next trip to Nevada, visit www.TravelNevada.com.

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Planes return to sky in Air Races tomorrow

September 11, 2012

After a year of uncertainty, planes will once again return to the skies tomorrow in the TravelNevada.com Reno Air Races.

Qualifications rounds for the 49th annual air racing event are now underway at the Stead Airfield, and continue through Wednesday at noon.

Racing will begin around noon tomorrow with all classes except the unlimiteds, which will start racing on Thursday afternoon.

In between the heats, there will be a world class airshow to keep the action in the skies above Stead Airfield.

There will also be a tribute to last year's tragedy on Thursday and Sunday.

All classes race each day from Sept. 12-16, starting at 8am and continue nonstop until 4:30pm. For more information, visit www.airrace.org.

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Pilot unhurt in rough landing at Reno Air Races

September 12, 2012

A pilot made a rough emergency landing at the Reno National Championship Air Races but escaped unhurt.

Race officials say Matt Jackson of Van Nuys, Calif., radioed in a "May Day" because of a problem with the landing gear in his vintage World War II fighter during qualifying heats about 4:15 p.m. Tuesday in the "Unlimited class" at Reno-Stead Airport.

Fire trucks and emergency crews manned a runway on the far side of the course away from the grandstand as Jackson brought his Hawker Sea Fury called "Furias" down slowly. But race spokeswoman Valerie Miller-Moore says his right gear collapsed. His plane slid off the runway and spun around in the sagebrush, sending up a cloud of dust.

Miller-Moore says Jackson is fine, but he did wreck the paint job on the plane.

Qualifying has resumed.

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Grief counselors help after tragic air race crash

September 13, 2012

Mixed in with the hot-dog stands, souvenir T-shirt tents and barbecue pits is a different kind of booth this year behind the grandstand at the 49th annual National Championship Air Races in Reno.

Race organizers have contracted with a private firm for two grief counselors to provide help in the aftermath of last year's deadly crash.

Race spokesman Mike Draper says they expect everyone will have a different emotional reaction to the tragedy. He says organizers wanted to be sure anyone who needs it will have someone to talk to.

Tim Maloney is a longtime race volunteer and pastor at a California church already has helped provide informal counseling to some fellow volunteers. He says those who kept their emotions bottled up are the most vulnerable.

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Nevada air race goes on 1 year after deadly crash

September 13, 2012

The vintage World War II fighters roaring out of the Valley of Speed are as loud as ever, their colorful paint jobs as bright as the enthusiasm of the loyal aviation buffs who fill the grandstands in Reno.

But it's not exactly business as usual at the 49th annual National Championship Air Races. The element of danger persists despite new safety measures put in place after a P-51 Mustang took a deadly plunge into spectators last year. Pilots will still be flying souped-up muscle planes wingtip to wingtip, sometimes exceeding 500 mph.

"We never thought this would happen, but we know it's not knitting," said Marilyn Dash, a biplane pilot from the San Francisco Bay area. "It's not bowling. Nobody ever was killed bowling, were they?"

Race organizers adopted a half dozen changes recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board following the crash last September that killed 11 people, including pilot Jimmy Leeward, and injured more than 70 others.

A reminder of the danger came Tuesday during qualifying heats for the fastest planes when the pilot of a vintage Hawker Sea Fury was forced to make an emergency landing. He escaped uninjured after the hard landing kicked up a cloud of dust visible from the grandstands.

The qualifying heat resumed in the unlimited class, where two-time national champion Steve Hinton Jr. posted the top speed of 493 mph earlier in the day.

But there are differences from last year. The course is now more than 1,000 feet from the grandstand, instead of 850; fuel trucks are set away from the landing strip; and the final turn of the race is less sharp.

Some changes are more noticeable than others. The impact crater from last year's crash on the edge of the tarmac that has been paved over with asphalt, and the race officially changed its name to "TravelNevada.com National Championship Air Races and Air Show presented by Breitling."

The new name is the result of a one-time, \$600,000 sponsorship the state tourism commission extended as necessary to keeping the event alive in the face of soaring insurance premiums.

Race organizers hope the most significant changes will be behind-the-scenes, in training classes intended to better prepare pilots for intense gravitational pull and wake turbulence, and along pit row, where mechanics will be subject to a new inspection process that requires follow-up confirmation that ordered repairs actually get done — a possible contributor to Leeward's demise.

"It really seems about the same," Eric Zine, a pilot from Van Nuys, Calif. "There's increased focus on safety. But we're doing stuff people don't do. It's not normal to try to make a plane go faster than it's designed to go."

The Reno Air Racing Association also established a new position of safety czar who has the authority to shut down the competition immediately if concerns arise.

NTSB chairwoman Deborah Hersman commended race organizers for steps that place more emphasis on making the event safe for competitors and spectators alike.

Reno Mayor Bob Cashell and Sparks Mayor Geno Martini plan to help lead a special opening ceremony before the six classes of championships begin Thursday and run through Sunday. Thursday's tribute will focus on first responders with another on Sunday honoring victims and family members.

"The last year has been a true test to our organization, our fans, both the northern Nevada and aviation communities," said Mike Houghton, president and CEO of the Reno Air Racing Association.

"We will truly never forget the incredible display of courage that was shown in a moment of tragedy last year by the first responders, victims and fans," he said.

Advance ticket sales for the races have been off, but Houghton said he's heard a number of people are making last-minute plans to attend and he expects swift walk-up sales.

Dr. Anne Coatney, an emergency-room specialist from Seattle who was at the races last year and helped treat the wounded, didn't think twice about returning.

"We are going to be sitting there in our same box seats we've been in now for the last 20 years. It's kind of like a big reunion. I have no apprehension whatsoever," she said.

Coatney was in her seat on the edge of the tarmac about 4:15 p.m. on Sept. 16, 2011, when Leeward's Galloping Ghost surged into the air, then turned over and slammed nose first into the box seats on the edge of the grandstand.

Despite the changes, critics remain dissatisfied with what they call continuing safety deficiencies at the air races. One of the most vocal, Mark Daniels, wants the pilots in the fastest planes to be required to wear anti-gravity suits like they do in the military to keep them from blacking out, as Leeward did.

The former Army helicopter mechanic and air traffic controller also thinks it would be safest to have the grandstand in the infield because the centrifugal force of planes sends them toward the crowd when they lose control.

Daniels has been banned from the grounds and believes it is because of the criticism — something he's suing over in federal court.

Houghton said the ban is based on threats Daniels has made to him and others and has nothing to do with the criticism.

Daniels said he understands why last year's tragedy hasn't dampened many fans' fascination with the only event of its kind in the world.

"They don't think it could happen again — that lightning could strike twice," Daniels said. "And they love air racing. It's the air racing bug. When it bites you, there is no quitting it."

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Reno Air Races honor heroes from deadly 2011 crash

September 13, 2012

Thousands of spectators joined officials at the National Championship Air Races to pay tribute to emergency personnel who saved countless lives after last year's mass casualty crash at Reno-Stead Airport.

Reno Air Race President Mike Houghton said Thursday's formal opening ceremony was a somber memorial to those killed in an "unthinkable tragedy" and "a humble tribute to the compassion on display under challenging circumstances."

The pilot and 10 people on the ground were killed last Sept. 16. More than 70 were injured.

Among those recognized Thursday were four Reno nurses who raced from a first aid station behind the grandstand to treat 20 critically injured fans. Also honored was a military crew that used a Huey helicopter that was on display that day to ferry victims to the hospital.

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Action packed weekend for TravelNevada.com Reno Air Races

September 14, 2015

The third day of the TravelNevada.com Reno Air Races wrapped up Friday and fans say there ready for the grand finale this weekend.

"When you hear those round engines coming you get goose bumps you just get so excited because you know they're coming," long time Reno Air Races fan Sandy Anderson says.

They're coming and some of them at speeds of up to 500-miles an hour.

"It's always fast, it's always very competitive, these pilots are very skilled, some of the best pilots in the world," R&R partners public affairs with the TravelNevada.com Reno Air Races Mike Draper says.

And the race is on there will be 12 heat races Saturday and Sunday.

The big dogs, the fastest of the fast, the unlimited gold heat will be crowning a new champion Sunday.

Air race fans can get a chance to see the beautiful works of aviation up close.

About 150 planes are parked in the pits for fans to check out, explore and talk to pilots.

"There's nothing like seeing them in person. I would suggest getting a pit pass going and seeing these airplanes with the big engines in there and the guys working on them," Jelly Belly pilot/owner Kent Pietsch says.

Air show planes will also be flying in between every heat, including the jaw dropping flying of the F-18 Super Hornet and F-22 Raptor.

Pietsch is a pilot and lover of all that is aviation says this is a chance for everyone to come together and watch these amazing planes, their pilots, and remember.

"The tribute is to all of the great people, the freedom I talked about they had in their heart," Pietsch says.

There will be a tribute ceremony Sun. for the victims and their families at 11:30 a.m.

Draper agrees with Pietsch and says the pilots, fans, and community are what the air races are all about.

"Just being back here and being able to laugh and have some fun and even to share some tears with people you haven't seen in a while that's been the best part of the week and I think it will be through the weekend," Draper says.

The TravelNevada.com Reno Air Races will take off Sat. and Sun. round 8 a.m. and finish up sometime after four.

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Rare Bear: The story behind the horse power

September 15, 2015

Rare Bear is a F8F-2 Bearcat first flown during World War II. Now under current owner Rod Lewis Rare Bear plane got a second life after almost \$15-million worth of restoration.

"It is one of those aviation icons. It is so energy compact i mean it's a huge engine in a small airplane and all the support system uses every square inch," Rare Bear Crew Chief David Cornell says.

According to Cornell it's one of the fastest planes in the world he says the plane has broken world records, climb records and speed records.

All stats current pilot Stewart Dawson and crew are very proud of, but that comes with a lot of hard work in between and during shows.

Cornell tells News 4 for every one hour of flying it takes 600 man hours just to prep the plane for the next flight.

Dawson says all that work pays off and believes Rare Bear is unlike any other.

"You develop a relationship with the airplane you know and this one's a lot of work some of them are easy this is a lot of work seems like it has its own personality," Dawson says.

Fans say it's that personality that keeps them coming back to Reno Air Races.

"It's amazing to see such a big and fast plane in the air," air races attendee Amanda Silver says. "When I was really little he would always amaze me with what he does."

Rare Bear competes in the unlimited class and this week qualified at 490-miles an hour.

"It's hard to describe what it is until you've been in it you can see it in a movie and everything, but until you're in the airplane with the noise and the wind and the heat, it's hard to describe," Dawson says.

Hard to describe and hard to beat, because the plane is a rare one.

Rare Bear finished third Saturday in the unlimited gold heat so it's all on the line Sunday.

Rare Bear will be racing seven other planes to see who will named the 2012 champion of the TravelNevada.com Reno Air Races.

The air races start their final day Sunday around 8 a.m.

There is a tribute ceremony at 11:30 a.m. and the unlimited gold heat will take off around 4:15 p.m.

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11 killed in 2011 crash at Reno air races honored September 16, 2012

Spectators and racers paid tribute Sunday to 11 people who were killed when a plane crashed into box seats at last year's Reno National Championship Air Races.

A moment of silence was held on the anniversary of the accident at Reno-Stead Airport for pilot Jimmy Leeward and 10 victims on the ground.

The emotional ceremony before a crowd of tens of thousands also featured the release of white balloons and a flag presentation after each victim's name was read.

Among the injured in attendance were members of a Kansas family. The crash killed 73-year-old Cherie Elvin, of Lenexa, Kan., while her husband, Chuck, two sons and daughter-in-law lost part of their legs.

Leeward's P-51 Mustang fighter reached 530 mph before it pitched skyward and then slammed nose-first into box seats.